



Department of Justice

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THREE MEN INDICTED FOR RACIALLY-MOTIVATED CHURCH ARSON IN SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

WASHINGTON – Three individuals were indicted today by a federal grand jury in the District of Massachusetts for conspiring to interfere with the civil rights of members of the Macedonia Church of God in Christ, a Springfield, Mass., church with a predominantly African-American congregation.

The indictment was announced by Loretta King, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division; U.S. Attorney Michael J. Sullivan for the District of Massachusetts; Glenn N. Anderson, Special Agent in Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives - Boston Field Division; Warren T. Bamford, Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Boston Field Office; Colonel Mark Delaney, Superintendent of the Massachusetts State Police; William Bennett, Hampden County District Attorney; and Commissioner William J. Fitchet of the Springfield Police Department.

The church's newly constructed building burned to the ground on Nov. 5, 2008, hours after the election of President Barack Obama. The indictment alleges that Benjamin Haskell, 22, Michael Jacques, 24, and Thomas Gleason, 21, all of Springfield, conspired to burn the church in retaliation for the election of the country's first African-American president.

"These allegations of racial violence connected with the presidential election are serious and disturbing," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Loretta King. "The Justice Department will aggressively prosecute individuals who conspire to commit such acts of violence and intimidation."

The indictment alleges that several hours after Barack Obama was elected President, Haskell, Jacques and Gleason conspired to burn the Macedonia Church of God in Christ's new under-construction church building, which was 75 percent complete at the time of the fire. According to the indictment, on Election Night, Haskell, Jacques and Gleason used racial slurs and expressed anger with the election of Barack Obama and discussed burning the Macedonia Church of God in Christ's new church building because the church members, congregants and bishop were African-American. They then obtained gasoline, poured it on the interior and exterior of the new church building and started a fire that destroyed nearly the entire structure. Some of the responding firefighters suffered injuries as they worked to extinguish the blaze.

“Racism has devastating effects on individuals, and stifles the quality of life in the community,” said U.S. Attorney Sullivan. “We will not tolerate those who victimize others and I am angered and saddened that the neighborhood has endured such cruel acts by those allegedly living in the same community.”

If convicted, Haskell, Jacques and Gleason face a maximum prison sentence of 10 years to be followed by three years of supervised release. The details contained in the indictment are allegations. The defendants are presumed to be innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

The case is being investigated by the FBI; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Massachusetts State Police; Hampden County District Attorney’s Office and the Springfield Police Department. It is being prosecuted by Trial Attorney Erin Aslan of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Paul Smyth and Kevin O’Regan of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the District of Massachusetts.

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